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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001367

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SALAFIST PARLIAMENT SPEAKER PLEDGES TOLERANCE,
COOPERATION WITH SHIA

REF: A. 05 BAGHDAD 1085 AND 1102

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1360

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford,
reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Newly elected Iraqi Parliament Speaker al-Mashadani told us April 26 that he would work closely with the Kurdish and Shia deputy speakers to craft compromises that would reinforce Iraqi unity in the years ahead. Clearly relishing his new post, al-Mashadani said Iraqi Sunni Salafists must reach out to Shia to demonstrate the real possibility of peaceful coexistence in a united Iraq. Mashadani has been quite outspoken and anti-Shia in the past, and we will have to see if he actually operates the way he said he would. His success or failure will be an important indicator of the success of the broader national unity government. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Newly elected Iraqi Council of Representatives Speaker Mahmud al-Mashadani highlighted to us April 26 that he would work closely with the Kurdish and Shia deputy speakers and help consolidate national unity. Mashadani said he was already starting to consult closely with Deputy Shaykh Khaled al-Atiyeh from the Shia Islamist Coalition and Dr. Aref Tayfur from the Kurdish Alliance about how to run the parliament. Mashadani acknowledged that legislation over the next years would involve compromises from all sides, but he thought the leadership could work together to consolidate national unity. In the end, he underlined, Iraq's Sunni Arabs and Shia must live together.

[1](#)3. (C) PolCouns stressed that Mashadani cannot be perceived as acting merely as a representative of Iraq's Sunni Arab community; he must truly represent all Iraqis. Mashadani readily agreed, saying he planned to seek meetings with Muqtada Sadr and Ayatollah Sistani to demonstrate to the Sunni Salafists the importance of reaching across sectarian lines. PolCouns noted that Salafists in general, and Iraqi Salafists in particular, are not famous for their tolerance. Mashadani rejoined that in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, al-Qa'ida and other extremist groups have hijacked the Salafist trend. Obviously, he commented, Sunni and Shia will have differences, but the correct approach in such cases is to "look back to before" to see how to resolve them.

[1](#)4. (C) Noting that the Sunni Arabs are the ones who claim to speak most for Iraqi national unity, Mashadani said they would now have to show that mean what they say. He predicted that if Islamists, both Sunni and Shia, demonstrate that they can coexist in Iraq they can score political advantage over Iraqi secularists who warn that

religious political parties fuel sectarianism.

¶5. (C) Mashadani claimed that hard-line Sunni Arabs who had so far been sympathetic to the insurgency were telling him privately of their surprise that the Americans had let Mashadani reach the presidency of the parliament. Mashadani said he was responding that the Americans had opened "a very wide space." PolCouns noted that commitment to democratic principles and the constitution was the key for the U.S.

¶6. (C) Comment: Mashadani expressed surprise to us that he was elected the speaker. (He claimed his election forestalled a crisis within the ranks of the Sunni Arab Tawafuq front about divisions of political gains - see ref b.) In our first meetings with al-Mashadani in early 2005 he appeared more a lunatic ranting about the Shia than a flexible politician (see refs). He claimed on April 26 that he has softened his views (and we have seen less ranting). At this meeting, he certainly hit the right notes. We know that al-Mashadani has met intensively with the Shia and Kurdish deputy speakers (for example, they were coming out of his office as we went in on April 26). That said, we have also heard that al-Mashadani and his immediate team are checking into the sectarian backgrounds of the parliament's permanent staff. There are certainly suspicions among Iraqi politicians about al-Mashadani's suitability as speaker, particularly after his April 23 interview with Al-Jazeera. Thus, his performance will be one important gauge of how strong this national unity government will be. He welcomed our engagement personally with him and with the parliament as a whole going forward.

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